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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8423rd meeting

Thursday, 13 December 2018, 4 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Adom	(Côte d'Ivoire)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Blok
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Hunter

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/1104)

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The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/1104)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/1110, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Kuwait and Sweden.

I draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2018/1104, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Over the past two weeks, Sweden and Kuwait, as penholders for the humanitarian aspect of the Council's work on Syria, have conducted broad consultations with members of the Security Council and other relevant parties in order to renew the resolution on humanitarian access to Syria, including the fundamental provisions of resolution 2165 (2014). Those negotiations and consultations have been fruitful and helpful. We thank all Council members for their constructive engagement in the consultations. Consequently, Sweden and Kuwait have presented to the Council what they believe to be a purely humanitarian and balanced draft resolution, which renews cross-border humanitarian operations for 12 months, in line with the Secretary-General's recommendation.

The cross-border assistance authorized by the Security Council remains a vital part of the humanitarian response. In November alone, life-saving cross-border humanitarian assistance was provided to more than 600,000 people, including food assistance to nearly 500,000. The number of those who are still in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria is 13 million, which is a very significant number.

The renewal of the resolution would allow the Security Council to continue to help ease the human suffering of the people and ensure delivery by the shortest route to humanitarian assistance to those in Syria who need it. Such cross-border humanitarian assistance continues to complement other mechanisms of humanitarian response in Syria, where millions of people depend on cross-border humanitarian assistance to survive. That is why we call on all Council members to support the draft resolution and vote in favour of it.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against

None

Abstaining

China, Russian Federation

The President (*spoke in French*): The draft resolution received 13 votes in favour, none against and 2 abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2449 (2018).

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: Let me begin today by thanking Council members for their decision just now to adopt resolution 2449 (2018). Cross-border aid provides a critical lifeline to millions of Syrians who cannot be

supported through any other means. The Council has done its part; we will now do ours to sustain aid in a way that is as effective and accountable as possible.

The situation in the north-west of Syria, where some 3 million people remain dependent on humanitarian cross-border operations, is very challenging. While a pause in air strikes has had a meaningful impact on the lives of people there, shelling and fighting in the areas in and around the demilitarized zone continue to result in civilian death and injury and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. In late November, a mortar struck a primary school in Jarjanaz town just as students were leaving, killing four boys and two girls and injuring ten other children. Insecurity continues and incidents affecting civilians continue to be reported every day. The recent hostilities have reportedly forced nearly 15,000 people to flee their homes for neighbouring villages, with many people living in the open, without adequate shelter, during the cold winter months. They join the many thousands already living in tents or under plastic sheeting.

The United Nations and non-governmental organizations continue to respond to ensure that those in need get help, but fighting and displacement make the situation more difficult and the population more vulnerable. Idlib remains on the edge of a humanitarian disaster. Should there be a further escalation of violence, the needs would quickly overwhelm the ability of humanitarian agencies to respond. The parties to the conflict must take care to spare the civilian population, while at the same time taking all possible measures to see that the violence in Idlib ends and that the humanitarian catastrophe the Secretary-General has warned of does not come to pass.

Humanitarian organizations estimate that up to 6,000 people remain trapped in areas under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, east of the Euphrates, in Deir ez-Zor governorate. Civilians continue to suffer, as a result of both ground fighting and air strikes. On 29 November, air strikes reportedly hit a field hospital in the area, killing and injuring scores of civilians, including women, children and medical staff. Freedom of movement is heavily restricted. Some 9,000 people have been able to flee since September, but they continue to find themselves in harm's way, living in difficult conditions and with extremely limited access to basic assistance and services.

The most recent aid to reach displaced people in the area was in October. The most recent humanitarian mission to the area had to turn back when its vehicles came under attack and one aid worker was shot. After receiving treatment, he is now in stable condition, but the civilians in the area continue to suffer without the basic support that they need. I also remain very concerned about the more than 40,000 people in Rukban, where we continue to receive reports of civilian suffering and death.

The deployment of our convoy in early November has shown that where there is a political will, humanitarian organizations can mobilize quickly and provide help to those in need. I once again thank all who were involved in that. We need to build on that first delivery with a second convoy later this month to provide food, water, hygiene and sanitation support, and medical and nutrition items, as well as blankets, mattresses and other essential non-food items to help protect people during the winter. A second convoy will also allow us to carry out further vaccinations and speak to people about their plans as we look towards more sustainable solutions.

I want to assure the Council that the first delivery was effective. We monitored the delivery of aid inside the camp for three days. We will make additional efforts to strengthen the monitoring of the distribution in the next convoy. We will send a bigger team, and we plan to accompany the assistance from the offloading point to the distribution points inside the makeshift settlement to oversee the actual distributions and to conduct post-distribution monitoring. My message to all concerned parties is therefore simple. I ask them to provide the authorizations, facilitation letters and all the necessary security guarantees for the convoy to proceed without delay or impediment.

Sustaining and scaling up the response is also critical in other parts of the country, including in areas under the control of the Government, where we now estimate that 8.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. From January to September, humanitarian organizations operating from inside Syria have been reaching an average of 3.2 million people every month. A key priority has been addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in locations that have seen shifts in control. Some 1.6 million people live in areas that have changed control since the beginning of the year. Some areas have suffered for years under siege, have been impacted by intense military activity prior

to changing control or have seen no resumption of basic services since changing control. Up to one-third of those people are living in areas categorized by the United Nations as hard-to-reach, where the United Nations and its partners do not have a sustained presence and as a result, humanitarian needs are particularly severe. Aid has reached 40 per cent of those locations, including through a blanket agreement for access to northern rural Homs and southern Hama. However, sustained access to too many areas remains limited and some areas are still not accessible at all.

Improving our response is not only about reaching more people, although that is part of it. We are also increasingly focused on further improving the quality of our access and programming. What do we mean by quality in humanitarian assistance? First, assistance must be based on an assessment of needs. Secondly, it means being able to monitor and evaluate our impact, including by directly engaging with the people we are trying to help. Thirdly, it involves ensuring protection for the most vulnerable and sustaining our reach month after month, based on the needs identified. We are making progress in many of those areas. The United Nations is reaching many places, with more than 550 missions over the past three months to assess, deliver or monitor the delivery of assistance. We are also working on expanding our field presence in governorates outside Damascus to enhance our ability to engage with communities, assess needs, deliver assistance and monitor impact. We continue to engage with all parties to the conflict, including the Government of Syria, at multiple levels to negotiate access and ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those most in need. I will report to the Council on our progress in improving access in the months ahead.

Let me conclude by recalling the five requests I made to the Council two months ago (see S/PV.8384). The full implementation of those requests will remain an important focus of our work as we move into 2019, recognizing that other issues may also arise as the situation evolves.

First, with the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018), important progress has been made, but we must see access continue without impediment. Secondly, while we have seen the continued implementation of the agreement between Russia and Turkey in the north-west, it is critical that it be sustained with respect for civilians and civilian infrastructure, and that there be an end to the current hostilities. A full military onslaught on Idlib and the surrounding areas must be avoided at all costs. Thirdly, there must be support to ensure that approval for the next humanitarian convoy to Rukban is immediately granted and that secure access is provided to the makeshift settlement. Fourthly, we must be able to enjoy the Council's ongoing support so we can further build on our efforts to ensure quality access, through which we can carry out additional needs assessments, deliver to all areas where needs are most severe, and monitor the impact of our interventions. Fifthly, we must provide financing for our current humanitarian response plan. Donors have provided more than $2.1 billion this year, but the plan remains only two-thirds funded.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I will say a few words on behalf of the co-penholders, Sweden and Kuwait, and follow up with a few remarks in my national capacity as the representative of Sweden.

With the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018) today, the Security Council has upheld its obligation to millions of people in Syria. On behalf of the co-penholders, Kuwait and Sweden, I strongly welcome this decision. The renewal of the modalities of resolution 2165 (2015) for an additional 12 months will continue to save lives and alleviate suffering every day in Syria. The United Nations does not have an alternative route for reaching those people in need. It is an existential lifeline.

While the situation on the ground has changed much over the past year, the humanitarian needs unfortunately remain enormous. There are millions of people who still depend on humanitarian assistance. This resolution is about ensuring that they receive assistance through the most direct routes and that the relief reaches as many people as possible throughout the country. The United Nations cross-border operations, based on resolution 2165 (2015), are necessary as long as the humanitarian needs remain and humanitarian access from within the country is impeded.

As a co-penholder together with Kuwait, our compass has been defined by the humanitarian imperative to act. Over the past weeks, we have consulted all members of the Council and other stakeholders, including Syria and the neighbouring

countries. We have been committed to facilitating a fair, impartial and transparent negotiations process. It is well known that there are different perspectives on the Syrian conflict in the Council and that discussions can sometimes be heated. The adoption of today's resolution demonstrates, however, that in the face of urgent needs Council members can come together to shoulder a collective responsibility.

On behalf of the co-penholders, I would like to thank the representatives of all delegations for their constructive engagement during the negotiations on resolution 2449 (2018). I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and his team here in New York for their support. Most important, I would like to pay tribute to the staff of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners for their tireless efforts to help the Syrian people.

At this point, I would like to say a few words in my capacity as the representative of Sweden. The Charter of the United Nations places the people at the forefront, but, far too often, the people are forgotten or neglected during our deliberations in the Council. Our meetings on the humanitarian situation in Syria serve as a reminder that the Syrian conflict needs to be first and foremost about the Syrian people. The conflict in Syria has led to a humanitarian disaster, with consequences far beyond Syria's borders. As the conflict enters its eighth winter, 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and more than 5 million of them are children. Six million people are displaced within Syria, many of whom have been forced to flee more than once, and a further 5 million have fled to neighbouring countries. Without a doubt, a very heavy responsibility for this disaster inevitably rests with the Government of Syria — something that the international community will not forget.

For years, the Council has dealt with one crisis after another in Syria — each a humanitarian catastrophe in its own right. The conflict has been characterized throughout by a blatant disregard for human dignity. Homs, Aleppo and eastern Ghouta will not be forgotten. Idlib, where 3 million civilians are trapped with no safe place to flee, could yet be added to that list. It is key to uphold the fragile ceasefire in Idlib, where a military offensive would most likely result in a new humanitarian disaster of unimaginable proportions. We urge the Astana guarantors — Russia, Turkey and Iran — to ensure that the ceasefire is upheld and that civilians are protected.

The Council has on numerous occasions called on the parties — in particular the Syrian authorities — to allow safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access. Yet substantial and arbitrary obstacles remain, which are hindering the delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Syria. That includes areas that have recently been retaken by Government forces and their allies. Even if an occasional humanitarian convoy is allowed to reach those most in need, the fact is that the humanitarian actors do not have the access that the Council has repeatedly demanded.

Syria is a clear case in point in which the international legal order — built over decades to protect the most vulnerable in times of conflict — has come under threat. We have witnessed frequent violations of the rules and principles of international humanitarian law. We have witnessed indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas. We have witnessed the deliberate targeting of schools and hospitals, as well as attacks on humanitarian workers and medical personnel. And we have witnessed, over and over again, the refusal to grant humanitarian access to people in need of assistance. The integrity of the international legal order depends on our continuing to seek ways to ensure that those responsible for those crimes are brought to justice and held accountable.

During its two years on the Council, Sweden has repeatedly underlined the importance of upholding international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, whether in Syria, Yemen or South Sudan. Upholding the international rules-based order is pivotal both to preventing and terminating conflict. The rules and principles of international humanitarian law aim to limit the suffering and effects of war. We call on all parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian and medical personnel, and to respect and protect civilian objects, hospitals and medical facilities.

When taking up the co-penholdership for Syria and the humanitarian track, Sweden clearly stated that its commitment would be to the Syrian people and humanitarian principles. We have sought to depoliticize humanitarian matters and focus on the humanitarian imperative to act. Nevertheless, we will leave the Council with a strong sense of frustration. We fully understand those who claim that the international community has time and time again failed the Syrian people. Yet, today's adoption of resolution 2449 (2018)

proves that when there is political will, the Security Council can make a real difference on the ground for millions of people.

I wish to pay tribute to Kuwait, our co-penholder, for its excellent cooperation and, of course, to Egypt and Japan, with whom we shared penholdership in 2017. I take this opportunity to affirm Sweden's full commitment to continuing its strong and whole-hearted engagement to alleviate the humanitarian suffering in Syria and our support for neighbouring countries affected by the crisis. The humanitarian community has undertaken a Herculean task and we commend the courageous and selfless efforts of all humanitarian workers on the ground. Too many have paid with their lives throughout the conflict. The humanitarian appeal for Syria remains significantly underfunded, as we have just heard. This year alone, Sweden has contributed more than $50 million to the response in Syria. We must all do our share in making sure that the humanitarian agencies can continue to carry out their critical work to help the Syrian people.

Finally, we express our full support for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its assessment that the conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees are not yet in place. It falls to the Syrian authorities to ensure that those conditions are created. We also reiterate our concern that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, including the full and effective representation of women. That is the only path to sustainable peace and stability. We look forward to hearing from Mr. Staffan de Mistura on that point next week.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I welcome the presence among us of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. We also thank the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his valuable briefing on the latest developments concerning the humanitarian situation in Syria.

We fully associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Sweden, which was also made on our behalf, and I wish to make a few additional remarks in our national capacity.

We reiterate our support for all humanitarian actors and medical staff on the ground and commend their efforts to reduce the humanitarian suffering in Syria.

The Council has just adopted resolution 2449 (2018), which renews the mandate of the mechanism to deliver cross-border humanitarian aid for an additional year. The resolution is the result of weeks of discussions and consultations, during which we listened to the opinions of all members of the Council and relevant parties. We thank all States that voted in favour of the resolution.

The adoption of this humanitarian resolution represents an extremely important step in ensuring the direct delivery of humanitarian aid to millions of Syrians in need. The Council has therefore responded to the international community's calls by renewing this mechanism, which is a clear signal that the international community attaches great importance to the swift and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

Regrettably, this year has seen an increase in the humanitarian suffering in Syria. The conflict continues, threatening regional and international peace and security, while the Council remains unable to resolve the crisis. We are concerned by the recent escalation of the situation in various parts of the country, including Deir ez-Zor, Idlib and Aleppo. The current security situation in Syria demonstrates that it is still fragile and could lead to a military escalation, in particular in Idlib, where some 3 million people live. In that regard, we reaffirm the importance of maintaining the agreement reached between Russia and Turkey on Idlib in order to prevent a further humanitarian catastrophe there.

We also reaffirm that all parties must honour their commitments under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We reiterate the importance of holding accountable all those who have committed violations of international law and international humanitarian law. We must also ensure the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons, according to international criteria. The Council must therefore redouble its efforts and work collectively in order to resolve the crisis. The humanitarian situation will keep deteriorating if a political solution of the Syrian crisis is not reached pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

In conclusion, since this meeting is the last scheduled on the humanitarian situation in Syria for

this year, I take this opportunity to thank the delegation of Sweden, especially Ambassador Olof Skoog and his team, for their cooperation on the humanitarian file of a dear Arab State that should enjoy security and stability. We commend the marvellous performance of the delegation of Sweden, which was admired by everyone in the Council. After we closely worked with it on this and other dossiers, I can honestly say that the delegation of Sweden has enjoyed the great confidence of all members of the Council because of its demonstrated professionalism, credibility and integrity in upholding and staunchly defending the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We therefore again congratulate the Ambassador and the delegation of Sweden on their efforts and achievements, and look forward to working with the delegations of Germany and Belgium on the Syrian humanitarian dossier starting in January 2019.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Mr. Blok (Netherlands): I would like to thank Mr. Lowcock for his sobering briefing.

In March, I had the honour to speak in this Chamber for the first time (see S/PV.8217). The same topic was on the agenda: the humanitarian crisis in Syria. I am addressing the Security Council today in the knowledge that this situation will remain on the agenda for the foreseeable future. Millions of Syrians continue to suffer. Back in March, the Syrian regime and their allies were bombing civilians in eastern Ghouta. The delivery of humanitarian aid was obstructed and long-established norms of international humanitarian law were gravely violated.

Today, nine months later, the air strikes on eastern Ghouta have stopped. But as we all know, that did not mean an end to the horror for Syrians. Humanitarian workers continue to have very limited access. Many refugees and internally displaced persons cannot go back; they fear for their safety. The conditions set for their safe return by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have not been met.

After years of terror and starvation, children, women and men in former opposition-held territory still lack access to food, medical care and schooling. Access to those basic necessities is being blocked. Furthermore, those people now live in fear of retribution, persecution and detention by Al-Assad's security services. There is a complete lack of security. After seven years of war, more than 6 million Syrians are internally displaced, including the incredible number of 2.5 million children. After seven years of war, those people should be free to choose to go back to their homes. Instead, they are faced with discriminatory legislation that undermines their housing, land and property rights. After seven years of war, countless Syrians have had no news of the whereabouts of their loved ones. Is there still hope, or were their family members, neighbours and friends arrested, detained and tortured — or even killed — in regime-run prisons?

We have held a seat on the Security Council for one year. Many times, the situation in Syria has been on the agenda. Many times, progress has been blocked by the lack of implementation of Security Council resolutions. For how many more years will Syria remain on the agenda of the Security Council? For how many more years should we allow the Syrian regime's systematic human rights abuse and institutionalized violence to continue? It is clear that the situation must not be allowed to continue. Syrians are in dire need of progress. There are four points I would like to make.

First, humanitarian actors should have unimpeded access to all civilians in need, all over Syria. I that regard, I welcome the renewal of the mandate of the cross-border aid mechanism for 12 months so that no one is left behind. I commend Sweden and Kuwait, as co-penholders, for their excellent work. It is also imperative that access from within Syria to areas under control of the regime be granted without delay.

Secondly, we need a sustainable solution for the fragile ceasefire in Idlib. I call on all parties involved to refrain from hostilities, which would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe with grave international implications.

Thirdly, with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNHCR we have to uncover the fate of all those Syrians who have disappeared, list the names of those detained and investigate and prosecute human rights violators.

Finally, we fully support the Special Envoy's convening of a constitutional committee before the end of the year. The United Nations has a central role to play in that process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Sochi communiqué. Let me also underline that the European Union will not begin development and

reconstruction efforts before a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way. For my Government, it is inconceivable to finance a regime responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Let me say something about those crimes. Some of the darkest crimes of modern time have taken place during the Syrian conflict — and are still taking place. There will be no stability until the perpetrators of those crimes are brought to justice. To me it is clear that accountability is about upholding our human dignity, but what we see is impunity becoming the new normal. That must end. We must not allow this immense human tragedy to become a travesty of international law. It would be a terrible crisis of credibility for the international community. The perpetrators of shocking crimes, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and Al-Qaida, will be found.

I urge all States to increase their support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. Its aim is simple and clear: to ensure that information about serious crimes is collected, analysed and preserved for the future. I call on all Council members to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Finally, ISIS fighters have committed gruesome crimes that, in the case of the crimes against Yazidis, may amount to genocide. I call on all members of the Council to work together to achieve recognition by the Council of those grave crimes, including genocide, so that we can make sure such heinous crimes are not repeated.

This will be the last time I speak about Syria here, but I am sure that I will not be the last person to speak about Syria. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to fight for justice, peace and accountability for Syria and others — at the Council, in The Hague and beyond.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will soon end its term on the Security Council. On a more personal note, if I may, it has been an honour to speak on behalf of my country in this seat and in this Chamber. I know that discussions, debates and decisions in the Council are not always easy. However, that is no reason to despair. According to the writings of Tolstoy, for every situation, no matter how difficult, there will be a solution. It all comes down to making a decision.

Mr. Delattre (*spoke in French*): First and foremost, on behalf of France, I would like to welcome the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018). This resolution is vital, in the literal sense of the word, as cross-border humanitarian assistance is a matter of life or death for millions of Syrians. We are pleased by the spirit of responsibility within the Security Council, which has served to give priority to the humanitarian imperative over political considerations. On behalf of France as well, I would like to express our profound thanks to the Permanent Missions of Sweden and Kuwait and to my colleagues — the Permanent Representatives of those two delegations — personally for their truly outstanding work.

Allow me to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his briefing, which was, as always, meticulous and most enlightening. We reiterate our admiration for his work and the work of his teams in responding to the humanitarian emergency in Syria. I also welcome the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr. Stephanus Blok, among us today.

As Mr. Lowcock has already recalled to us, the situation in Syria continues to be a source of extreme concern. In the Idlib region in particular, ceasefire violations are on the rise and the risk of a humanitarian disaster still cannot be ruled out. We must therefore remain fully mobilized around three key priorities: the need to protect civilians, the need to guarantee humanitarian access and the need for a lasting political solution in Syria.

First, on the need to protect civilians, as highlighted by Mr. Lowcock, the situation in Idlib remains exceedingly fragile. The cessation of hostilities should not be a temporary solution, but should provide for the lasting stabilization of the situation in Idlib in line with the commitments made at the quadripartite summit held in Istanbul for a sustainable ceasefire in north-west Syria. That is the only way to protect civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel. It must be a top priority for all stakeholders. All parties must respect their obligations as stipulated by international humanitarian law. That imperative is non-negotiable.

The second priority is to ensure humanitarian access. It is imperative that the 13 million people in need receive humanitarian assistance. It is unacceptable for the regime to continue to block convoys to hard-to-reach areas. We reiterate our call to the actors with

influence over the regime to ensure safe, full and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syrian territory, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law. In Rukban camp in particular, it is essential that the United Nations be able to quickly dispatch a new convoy to deliver aid to the tens of thousands of people trapped in the camp and living in dire conditions.

While the Council has just adopted resolution 2449 (2018), which renews the mechanism established by resolution 2165 (2014), I would like to recall that there is no alternative to cross-border aid for the effective and impartial delivery of assistance to millions of people in need, including in Idlib, while the regime continues to use humanitarian aid for political purposes. That mechanism provides several hundred thousand people with crucial assistance every day.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate that there will be no lasting humanitarian solution without a credible political process. It is essential for everyone to assume their responsibilities and allow the United Nations to convene the first meeting of the constitutional committee before the end of the year, in accordance with the commitments made in Istanbul on 27 October. Provided that its composition is credible and balanced, the committee would be a positive first step in a political process to be conducted under the supervision of the United Nations, within the framework of resolution 2254 (2015). Such political progress should, in turn, facilitate the improvement of the humanitarian situation, with the goal of kick-starting a virtuous circle.

It is all the more urgent to recall this in a humanitarian briefing: humanitarian aid is an immediate need, subject to the conditions of strict neutrality, impartiality and independence. It is to be differentiated from reconstruction, which will be possible only once a credible, inclusive and irreversible political transition has begun.

Let us not be fooled by the regime's fable. The reality of the statistics clearly shows that it is not the absence of reconstruction that prevents the voluntary and safe return of refugees; it is the absence of guarantees against arbitrary arrests, forced expropriations, dispossession of identity documents, forced conscription and, more broadly, the lack of credible progress in the political process. The conditions for the return of refugees are freedom and security. We are committed to enabling such a safe and dignified return of refugees to their homes and properties. But that collectively implies creating the conditions for that return to be possible, within the framework guaranteed by international law.

France will continue to spare no effort to respond to the humanitarian situation in Syria and promote a credible political solution.

Mr. Hunter (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. Once again, we commend the very important work the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its humanitarian partners do on a daily basis to help the Syrian people. Mr. Lowcock's briefings shed light on the facts regarding Syrians in need of help and the humanitarian system's ability to reach them, and that helps us make decisions in the Security Council based on the realities on the ground and not on political spin.

The United States is proud to have voted in favour of resolution 2449 (2018), which renews resolution 2165 (2014) for another 12 months. I would like to commend Sweden and Kuwait for their stewardship over the negotiations to ensure that the Council's deliberations on the continuation of the United Nation's vital cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism remained focused on the needs of the Syrian people, millions of whom have received life-sustaining aid from the humanitarian aid mechanism established under resolution 2165 (2014) since the mandate was first adopted by the Council, four years ago.

Today's vote to continue the cross-border humanitarian deliveries will ensure that food, clothing, shelter and medical supplies reach, on average, 1 million people in Syria each month. The United Nations cross-border mechanism is transparent, effective and essential for improving humanitarian conditions inside Syria.

In the face of that astounding humanitarian need, the United States remains the single-largest humanitarian donor to the Syria crisis, having provided over $9 billion in humanitarian aid to those most in need since the start of the conflict. We are proud of our unwavering commitment to support the Syrian people, and we will continue it. But we need to be clear that conditions in Syria are not changing for the better, even though some would like us to think that they are.

In 2018 the Al-Assad regime attacked civilian populations using chemical weapons, air strikes and barrel bombs to reassert control over half the territory. Even as the regime has seized more territory, the truth

is that humanitarian needs are getting worse. In Syria today, there are 13 million people, over 70 per cent of the country's population, in need of humanitarian assistance. And, by far, most of the people who need assistance are in areas controlled by the regime. That is because, as always, the Al-Assad regime seeks to punish the Syrian people, not to help them.

When we look at the significant gaps in humanitarian access in eastern Ghouta, Idlib and Rukban, and we look at the ongoing instability of the security situation and the hundreds of thousands who remain arbitrarily detained in regime prisons, it is clear that the conditions in Syria are still very dire, and for many Syrians they remain very dangerous. Those conditions are not conducive to the facilitation of large-scale returns of refugees, and now is not the time to be pushing Syrians to return home.

Until the Al-Assad regime lives up to its commitments to provide regular, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and fully engage in a political transition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), the United States and our partners will not consider providing reconstruction funds for Syria, absent an irreversible political process.

It is a sad reality of the Syrian conflict that the Al-Assad regime remains committed to using humanitarian access and aid as a political tool. To this day Damascus has not approved United Nations aid convoys to access Idlib, where 3 million people can be reached only through the cross-border mechanism. The people of Rukban are once again waiting on the regime to facilitate a second aid convoy. The uncertainty around humanitarian access and the regime's unwillingness to uphold humanitarian principles are why a 12-month renewal of resolution 2165 (2014) was so critical.

Make no mistake that the United States looks forward to the day when this mandate is no longer needed — first, because there will be no risk of further military escalation by the regime or its allies, and, secondly, because we will see tangible improvements in unhindered and sustained access throughout Syria. However, it is clear from Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's briefing today that the humanitarian conditions in Syria remain dire. Security conditions are fragile, and in some areas they remain very dangerous. Cross-line and cross-border access remains vital for millions of Syrian civilians who rely on the continuation of this resolution's mechanism for life-sustaining aid.

Unfortunately, the risks of even greater humanitarian suffering in Syria remain high, absent tangible progress towards a political solution through the formation of a constitutional committee and due to troubling reports and indications of a potential military escalation in Idlib, despite the fragile ceasefire, held together by the Turkey-Russia brokered demilitarized zone.

Let me repeat that any military escalation in Idlib would be catastrophic for the millions of non-combatants there and for the stability of Syria's neighbours. Last week, my Government made public our analysis that pro-regime forces likely used tear gas against civilians in Aleppo on 24 November, and then the Al-Assad regime and Russia falsely accused the opposition and extremist groups of conducting a chlorine attack. We believe that the intention behind Damascus and Moscow's disinformation campaign was to use the alleged attack to undermine confidence in the ceasefire in Idlib.

Given the grave humanitarian consequences of a break in the Idlib ceasefire, it is important that Council members do all they can to ensure that the ceasefire holds. Efforts must move forward to form the constitutional committee as quickly as possible. Russia's promises to actively support the United Nations efforts to convene the committee have yet to be fulfilled, and the 30 December deadline, laid out in the Istanbul summit statement, is rapidly approaching.

Few places exemplify humanitarian need as much as Rukban, where once again a United Nations shipment of assistance is delayed. The United States is gravely concerned by the humanitarian conditions in Rukban and calls on the Al-Assad regime and the Russian Federation to take all the necessary steps to urgently facilitate the next aid convoy. The United Nations has underscored the need to move with a sense of urgency. Winterization supplies are urgently needed in the camp and UNICEF stands ready to conduct another round of critical children's immunizations. It should be noted that those vaccinations are time-sensitive.

This should not be a complicated or contentious process. The United States and Russia have worked successfully together to make a humanitarian delivery possible in November. It is important that we — the United States and Russia — work together with the United Nations again now to secure a second delivery to Rukban this month, as agreed.

Progress is possible. Let us spare no effort to facilitate an immediate delivery. There is no time for further delays. The United States is ready to move forward with the second delivery to Rukban immediately, and with the convening of the constitutional committee immediately. The Syrian people are still counting on the Council. We call on our fellow Council members and the Syrian regime and its allies to join in our sense of urgency and resolve these issues without further delay.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for being at this meeting, for his briefing and for all the work that his team is doing on the ground to help the people of Syria.

The United Kingdom joins other colleagues in welcoming the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018). This ensures that aid can continue to move across borders to reach those people who depend on its arrival. We thank the co-penholders, Sweden and Kuwait, for their sustained efforts to make agreement today possible.

As others have noted, this resolution keeps open routes for humanitarian aid that offer a lifeline to millions of Syrians, including those in hard-to-reach areas and those who could not otherwise receive the support they need. The United Nations has stated that 2.6 million people are accessible only through these cross-border routes.

The decision to renew resolution 2165 (2014) by way of today's adoption is therefore positive, but it is no cause for celebration, as the need for its renewal is the result solely of the dire situation on the ground. Approximately 13 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance, and 5.2 million of them are considered to be in acute need.

As the Dutch Minister reminded us, every month we come to the Council, we hear a briefing from the Under-Secretary-General and we say the same things. Every month there is a list from Under-Secretary-General of requests that the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have made for access for humanitarian assistance, and every month, very sadly and almost criminally negligently, the Syrian Government does not grant the request of the United Nations humanitarian wing. I think we all need to demand a really comprehensive answer as to why the requests from OCHA are not being met when so many people depend on humanitarian assistance for their survival. I really would appeal through you, Mr. President, to both the Russian and Syrian representatives in the Chamber today to let us have a proper explanation or, better, to grant the requests of OCHA so that those people can get the help they need.

We want to look forward to a time when humanitarian aid is no longer necessary, when we can offer help in rebuilding and reconstruction and when conditions allow the Syrians who have had to flee to return to their homes voluntarily, in safety and dignity and in line with international humanitarian law. But we need to be crystal clear that we are not there yet; Syria is not there yet. This resolution, as both my French and American colleagues noted, is emphatically not a call for refugee return. It is for the Syrian parties to create conditions that are conducive to their safe and voluntary return. That is a critical distinction. The Al-Assad regime, supported by its backers, has not only created an environment that makes humanitarian aid essential for millions of Syrians, but it continues to use aid as a weapon of war. We therefore call on the Syrian authorities to cease doing that respond to the requests of the United Nations and engage with the political process to pursue a credible, balanced political settlement, which provides the only foreseeable way out of the conflict. We look to Russia to use its influence with the Syrian authorities to press them to do that, maintain the ceasefire in Idlib, in accordance with the Sochi agreement, and ensure that humanitarian access continues for as long as it is necessary.

I also want to echo that reconstruction money will not be available from my Government or from our partners until there is a viable and lasting political process.

Adopting today's resolution sends a clear message from the international community that we remain committed to supporting the people of Syria. At the same time, it also sends a very clear message that aid should never be use as a weapon and must reach those who need it without impediment. It is also an important reminder that, notwithstanding our differences, as the Dutch Minister further reminded us, the Council can — and should — act on Syria.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his comprehensive briefing. Allow me to also praise our colleagues from Kuwait and Sweden for their efforts and their leadership in leading the process of very difficult negotiations. I am very pleased to see the result, and I congratulate them again on their work.

We welcome the outcome of today's vote on resolution 2449 (2018), which renews the cross-border deliveries mechanism. We have underlined our strong support for that renewal many times. It enables humanitarian supplies to cross into Syria, provides aid to those in urgent need and supports the delivery of basic services.

The conflict in Syria has caused violence and violations of the international law, including human rights law, and has brought suffering to the civilian population of Syria. The continuing impunity for serious violations of international humanitarian law remains for us a grave concern.

After a period of relative calm over the past two months, we are alarmed by the recent negative impact of armed conflict on civilians in many parts of Syria: the north-west and north-east of the country in particular. Any military operations should take all feasible precautions to avoid harm to the thousands of civilians who are trapped in the middle of the fighting on the ground.

We again see a risk of humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib governorate and the surrounding areas. Civilians across Idlib and the surrounding areas have continued to face a range of security threats, while massive humanitarian needs have persisted. We consider the agreement between Russia and Turkey on the Idlib de-escalation zone a right move towards avoiding a humanitarian catastrophe. But, at the same time, we again stress that all parties to the conflict should ensure the full implementation of the agreement.

While underlining the obligation of all the parties to the conflict to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, we insist on practical measures to alleviate civilian suffering. That is why we strongly believe that cross-border assistance remains a vital component of this major humanitarian response, which reaches millions of Syrians each month. It has to be noted that, according to humanitarian workers, one third of the people in need of humanitarian assistance are in areas that cannot be accessed from inside Syria, including nearly to 2 million internally displaced people in the Idlib de-escalation zone. Aid delivered from Turkey and Iraq continues to save lives.

Let me conclude by underlining that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. A political agreement remains the only way towards peace. That requires a genuine political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). In that context, I want to express our regret that no tangible progress was made during the last meeting in Astana in overcoming the stalemate on the composition of the constitutional committee. The efforts of the Special Envoy to establish a legitimate, credible and balanced constitutional committee in his remaining time in office have our full support.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

We would first like to comment on the Council's adoption just now of resolution 2449 (2018), extending the mandate for the cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance into Syria. Our position on that non-transparent — to put it mildly — mechanism is well known. The new realities in the Syrian Arab Republic demand that it be rejigged with the ultimate goal of being gradually but inevitably removed. That fact that that view was not reflected in the resolution determined our position on the vote. We were not about to block it altogether, owing to humanitarian considerations and appeals from our partners in the region. However, we want to point out that its text is divorced from reality and is based on four-year-old formulas. For example, why keep the Dar'a-Ramtha cross-border checkpoint on the list when the Syrian authorities have been controlling it from the Syrian side for a long time now? In the next few months we intend to monitor the supply of humanitarian assistance under the cross-border mechanism carefully and demand proper transparency and accountability.

The Secretariat's methods for preparing its reports on the humanitarian situation in Syria should also be carefully reviewed. The current report (S/2018/1104) does not cover such important points as assistance in rebuilding infrastructure, the trends in the return of refugees, the impact of unilateral sanctions on people's lives and mine-clearance issues. We urge our colleagues to reconsider the inflexibility of their approaches, which have little to do with the current situation in Syria, and to join in the collective efforts to improve the country's difficult socioeconomic situation, restore what the terrorists have destroyed and assure the inalienable right of refugees and internally displaced persons to return. In that context, we would like to point to the announcement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that more than 250,000 Syrians are ready to return home next year.

In our view, a selective approach to the provision of assistance to the Syrian people is unseemly. Politicizing issues related to humanitarian assistance is unacceptable. People cannot openly defame the Syrian Government while ignoring the unilateral steps taken by other actors in the Syrian conflict. At the very least, it is unethical to pretend that Raqqa does not exist. And yet 80 per cent of the city's civilian infrastructure lies in ruins. They are still pulling bodies out from under the rubble of people who died in the campaign to liberate the city from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), who according to some estimates number more than 8,000. Incidentally, at the time no one supported the proposal to introduce humanitarian pauses in order to get civilians away from the bombardments.

We need to urgently resolve two issues that are critical to improving the situation in Syria. The first is lifting the unilateral sanctions introduced by a number of States without delay. Those restrictions harm ordinary Syrians most of all, as independent experts, including some in the United Nations system, have acknowledged, by the way. Secondly, we have to end the illegal occupation of Syrian territory, which is not only undermining its territorial integrity and sovereignty but also strengthening separatist trends there, and that represents a threat to the national security of neighbouring countries.

Withdrawal from the 55-kilometre so-called security zone established by the United States around the Syrian town of Al-Tanf is the main precondition for a lasting solution to the Rukban problem. As we know, the conditions in the camp there, which according to various estimates is housing as many as 50,000 people, are very difficult, in fact bordering on a humanitarian disaster, with the residents basically being held hostage by the illegal armed groups active in the area that are linked to ISIL. Considering the deteriorating situation in the camp, at the beginning of November Russia supported sending a United Nations humanitarian convoy and made significant efforts to help organize it, including through its contacts with the Government of Syria. Unfortunately, the humanitarian operation within the 55-kilometre zone was not well organized. The distribution of the humanitarian aid was farmed out to militants from the Maghawir Al-Thawra group. The staff of the United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent had very limited access to the distribution process, which resulted in part of it falling into the militants' hands. That means that the next delivery of humanitarian aid to Rukban must be carefully thought through and the shortcomings of the first convoy eliminated. We have to agree on parameters that will ensure maximum transparency and the targeted distribution of assistance without the participation of illegal armed groups, and the Americans occupying the area have the responsibility for that.

The fact that the trend towards stabilization is strengthening in Syria is undeniable. Despite the continuing problems, there has been genuinely positive progress on the humanitarian front that is particularly noticeable in the territories controlled by Damascus. As we have repeatedly stressed, at this critical time the international community must now extend a helping hand to the Syrians in order to help them overcome the devastation and restore normal life for those who have made the decision to return voluntarily to their homeland. Incidentally, since the Russian initiative on this was launched in July the total number of returnees is now in the tens of thousands.

Today our American colleagues gave us disinformation squared. In April the Syrian Government was blamed for a staged chemical attack in Douma in eastern Ghouta. The outcome of the investigation is still unknown. The experts are apparently still collecting something or other. Might that be because admitting the provocation would mean acknowledging full-on involvement in the illegal act of aggression in April for which the provocation served as an excuse? And now, when we have reliable information that shells containing chlorine were used by the same militants who had used them before — which our Western partners had admitted — they have come up with a new tactic, accusing Syria and Russia of disinformation and forgery. The Syrian Government has invited specialists from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to Syria, but for some reason they are in no hurry to arrive. Apparently they are studying something remotely. Where other areas were concerned, they were in a rush to get there, although it is true that they did their evidence-collecting in spots far from where the incidents had actually taken place. And yet now Washington has borrowed a brilliant formula originally dreamed up by London whereby the Syrian Government poisoned its own citizens with tear gas and then blamed the militants. Gentlemen, this is all dreadfully clumsy and we can see right through the propaganda.

The Astana guarantors are now focusing on the situation in Idlib within the framework of the

implementation of the 17 September stabilization memorandum. However, it must be understood that the importance of a sustainable ceasefire does not negate the need to continue working to effectively combat terrorism. We note Turkey's serious efforts within its existing commitments to separate the terrorists from moderate groups. It would be helpful if those who originally supported those groups with the aim of replacing the legitimate Government made efforts to educate them. That would be a more fundamental contribution to the efforts to reach a settlement than the constant barrage of groundless questions and demands directed at Russia and other States about what to do and how to do it.

Russia and the other guarantor countries will continue their intensive efforts on the political front with regard to implementing the decision taken by the Syrians in Sochi to form a constitutional committee. Right now, the negotiations are at a particularly intensive stage. We continue to believe that all the parameters for the activity of a constitutional committee should be approved by the Syrians themselves. That is the only way that it can be effective and functional. We want to emphasize that there is no viable alternative to a constitutional committee. We urge everyone to join in the collective work of establishing a comprehensive political process, which is crucial to Syria, the Middle East and the entire international community, under the auspices of the United Nations and in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): Let me start by welcoming the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018), which we believe will enable the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to deliver essential life-saving assistance to all Syrians, based on their needs. We have always believed that the Council should be united in supporting the United Nations and its humanitarian partners, which have been working under difficult circumstances to deliver aid to millions of Syrians. Syrians' humanitarian needs should be our priority, and addressing them should be central to the Council's deliberations and decisions. We hope that the resolution we adopted today will contribute to ending the suffering of all Syrians. We would like to express our appreciation to the penholders, Kuwait and Sweden, for effectively leading the negotiation process, and we thank all delegations for their constructive engagement.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. Since this is our last statement on the Syrian humanitarian issue as a member of the Security Council, I want to take this opportunity to reiterate our profound appreciation for his effective leadership. His briefings have always been very useful in bringing the humanitarian tragedy in Syria to the attention of the Council and the entire world. I thank him for his outstanding and impeccable service. We also thank all humanitarian workers for their selfless service in delivering aid to all in need.

Despite a relative drop in the overall intensity of violence, civilians in some parts of Syria are still affected by the direct and indirect consequences of hostilities, including deaths, injuries and the destruction of civilian facilities. In that regard, we concur with the Secretary-General, whose most recent report (S/2018/1104) appealed for enhancing the efforts to maintain the de-escalation and the agreed demilitarization zone in Idlib and to protect civilians. We reiterate our appreciation to Turkey and Russia for their continued efforts to implement the Idlib agreement. Avoiding a military escalation there remains critical to averting any possible humanitarian catastrophe. In that connection, we encourage all States with influence on the parties to work together and strengthen global coordination in combating terrorist groups on the United Nations list.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners have continued to reach millions of people through all the available access routes, including through cross-border assistance, which the report of the Secretary-General cites as a vital part of the humanitarian response. We welcome the continued endeavours to scale up humanitarian aid delivered from inside Syria. In that regard, we strongly encourage the United Nations and the Syrian Government to continue their consultations on improving humanitarian access to all areas, including those that are hard to reach. The safe, sustained and unhindered delivery of humanitarian access remains critical for all Syrians. In that regard, the implementation of the resolution we adopted today is crucial to improving humanitarian access.

In conclusion, as we have repeatedly stated, only a comprehensive political solution can address the humanitarian tragedy in Syria. There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. It will be resolved only with a political solution, facilitated by the United Nations, based on resolution 2254 (2015), which commits to meeting the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria. As the Secretary-General reminded us in his report, the sole goal of United Nations efforts — ending

the suffering of Syrians — should be supported by us all. In that regard, we look forward to Special Envoy de Mistura's briefing next week.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for his briefing.

As some of our colleagues have already said, the conflict in Syria has lasted for more than seven years, and according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 500,000 people have lost their lives and approximately 13 million people are in need, of whom 5.3 million are children. Nonetheless, the Syrian people continue to hope for peace in their country and for a return to normal everyday life, which at the moment seems a long way off. We deplore the fact that non-State armed opposition groups and Security Council-designated terrorist groups are still perpetrating attacks that result in the death or displacement of innocent civilians. In spite of that, however, we want to remind the Council that all counter-terrorism-related initiatives should take international law into consideration.

Bolivia voted in favour of today's resolution because we believe that humanitarian assistance for the Syrian people is urgent, particularly those in hard-to-reach areas, as well as the most vulnerable who are in need of protection and psychosocial support. We thank the delegations of Kuwait and Sweden for their commitment during the negotiations on the text for today's adoption of resolution 2449 (2018).

There have been numerous meetings on this issue since Bolivia's election as a member of the Council. We have witnessed the pressing need of the Syrian people for humanitarian assistance, but we have also seen major progress made in stabilizing and in de-escalating the violence of previous years, which in the past few months has brought about a palpable change in the conflict on the ground, owing primarily to the opening up of dialogue between the parties involved. We highlight the Astana agreements, which have enabled the establishment of important de-escalation zones, and which we see as one of the initiatives that will help to reduce the level of violence in order to facilitate peace and stability in Syria. We also want to highlight the agreement brokered by Russia and Turkey establishing a demilitarized zone to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and emergency medical evacuation, as well as the surrender of heavy weaponry by some members of terrorist groups. We encourage the parties to replicate those agreements, as well as that made in Istanbul on 27 October between Turkey, Russia, Germany and France. Such commitments have a major impact on people when they enable humanitarian assistance and medical attention to reach them quickly.

We also commend the most recent compromise between the United Nations and the Governments of Syria, Jordan, Russia and the United States enabling a convoy with humanitarian aid for 50,000 people to enter Rukban camp, and we call for the continuation of efforts to bring in humanitarian aid and cross-border convoys within a framework of respect for the sovereignty of Syria, which has reclaimed much of its territory.

I would once again like to pay special tribute to the personnel of the various humanitarian agencies and organizations who risk their own safety and lives to do their work. Within the framework of international humanitarian law, we call on the parties to guarantee unconditional and unhindered access to aid personnel, keeping them safe and secure and ensuring that humanitarian convoys and personnel, medical centres and schools do not become military targets, regardless of the circumstances. We encourage the parties involved to continue their efforts to enable emergency medical evacuations and the establishment of humanitarian corridors that allow civilians to move around voluntarily, as well as ensuring the dignified and safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their places of origin. Clearing those areas of unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines is an essential task, as is re-establishing water and sanitation services, schools and hospitals.

Bolivia rejects any attempts to fragment Syria or sow sectarianism in that country. We also reject the presence in Syria of foreign military forces without the authorization of the Syrian Government. Those forces must be withdrawn within the framework of international law and the principles of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. We also ask Mr. Lowcock to include in his next briefing the impact of the unilateral sanctions on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Those sanctions are illegal under international law and there is no doubt that they have an impact on the delivery of humanitarian aid. In addition, we reiterate our call for humanitarian aid to not be selective; furthermore, we call for the depoliticization of humanitarian aid. Finally, we

reiterate, as the representative of Ethiopia pointed out, there is no military solution to the situation in Syria. The only solution is to be found in an inclusive, Syrian-led process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and as part of the Geneva process under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the convening of this meeting and reiterates our gratitude to Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and his entire team for their work and for keeping us informed on a monthly basis about the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The shifting of the subject of this meeting from the political to the humanitarian briefing — the former originally slated for next week — led my delegation think that some development must have occurred that would make it possible to address the humanitarian issue in Syria with optimism and hope. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Despite the enormous human and financial resources mobilized and deployed by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners, the situation on the ground remains alarming. Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, enough has been said about the humanitarian situation and a number of reports have been produced that have led to the same conclusion, which is that the humanitarian situation remains extremely precarious, mainly due to increased hostilities in various parts of the country.

The Government of Equatorial Guinea remains concerned about the recent escalation of violence in various parts of the country, such as Idlib, where efforts must be redoubled to maintain the détente and ensure the demilitarization of the area, as agreed last September, and protect the civilian population. Furthermore, the reports of an alleged chemical attack at the end of November in Aleppo and the routine targeting of Deir ez-Zor by counter-terrorism operations require swift and decisive responses from the Council in order to protect thousands of families who, as the conflict continues, are losing their loved ones. Once again, we emphasize the need for the warring parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Nothing justifies the deliberate use of explosive weapons in populated areas or the use of chemical substances as a weapon of war. As such, we voted in favour of resolution 2449 (2018), on United Nations assistance in Syria, because we believe that the resolution is essential for cross-border operations. We hope that its adoption will, in turn, alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. We thank Ambassador Mansour and Ambassador Skoog for facilitating the drafting, negotiation and adoption of the resolution.

As the Secretary-General clearly describes in his report (S/2018/1104) and according to data from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, cross-border deliveries of humanitarian aid remain an indispensable lifeline for hundreds of thousands of people throughout Syria. Food aid reached an average of more than 750,000 people each month in the first nine months of 2018 as a result of the cross-border activities of the United Nations. There is no doubt that after many years of ongoing conflict, the Security Council, whose decisions are binding, should continue to play a key role in shaping Syria's future. It should do so by bringing forward any initiatives that may one day, as someone once said, heal the wounds of the suffering body of Syria. And that should always be done with full respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the country. The Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea will continue to prioritize a political solution to the conflict and calls once again for members of the Council to pay more attention to swiftly establishing and operationalizing the constitutional committee, in accordance with the outcomes of Syria's National Dialogue Conference and resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China abstained in the voting on resolution 2449 (2018), on renewing the measures for cross-border humanitarian assistance to Syria. China is of the view that the international community's humanitarian operations in Syria should abide by the principles that guide United Nations humanitarian work, as well as the relevant provisions of international law, and scrupulously observe the principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization, while ensuring that all areas in Syria and all the populations in need receive timely assistance.

Cross-border humanitarian assistance is a special modality in response to a set of specific circumstances. It must fully respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and proceed in strict compliance with Council resolutions. Actions in that regard should be place under the oversight of the United Nations, throughout the process, with greater

transparency. Due attention should be accorded to better coordination with the Syrian Government and practical measures should be put in place to prevent aid supplies from falling into the hands of terrorist groups.

China commends Kuwait and Sweden in their roles as co-penholders for taking on board proposals from Member States regarding, inter alia, facilitating the return of Syrian refugees, improving humanitarian operations and adjusting the frequency of the reports of the Secretary-General over the course of the consultations on the resolution. Nevertheless, some legitimate concerns raised by members of the Council, including China, were not fully taken on board. There was still room for improvement. We are of the view that members of the Council should continue to engage on that in order to maximize consensus. I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. I also commend the efforts of the United Nations and other actors concerned to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. China would like to share its perspective on the current humanitarian situation in Syria.

First, the humanitarian situation in Syria on the whole remains grim. Many years of conflict have left Syria with a large number of people in need of assistance, crumbling infrastructure, food insecurity and a lack of medical care and medicines. The situation in northern and eastern Syria remains fragile. Civilian casualties persist, as does the risk of a deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

Secondly, the security situation in Syria is stable on the whole. Conflict has eased throughout the country, which provides a more favourable environment for improving the humanitarian situation. Although the implementation of the memorandum on the stabilization of the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone has encountered some obstacles, the implementation process is by and large under way. The Astana dialogue at the end of November continues to play an important role in the continued improvement of the Syrian situation and in consolidating the cessation of hostilities and violence.

Thirdly, Syria's humanitarian assistance needs have recently changed. As the situation in some parts of Syria improves, the number of Syrian refugees returning from neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon is on the rise. The projections of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees put this number at a quarter of a million in 2019. The number of internally displaced persons returning to their homes has also steadily increased. The restoration or reconstruction of housing and of water, electricity, medical and educational facilities is a basic requirement, and the removal of mines and other explosive remnants of war is now a top priority.

In view of the current situation, the Syrian parties should put the greater good of national destiny and people's well-being first, respect the relevant Council resolutions, resolve differences through dialogue and consultation, work together to keep Syria stable, prevent an escalation of conflict, and continue to create enabling conditions to ease the country's humanitarian situation. It is incumbent upon the international community to further increase its assistance — financial and in kind — to the Syrian people and intensify support for the host countries of Syrian refugees, including Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. At the same time, the international community should step up its efforts to improve the humanitarian condition of returning Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons and create supportive conditions, whereby they can live and work happily in peace. Part of this process is the reconstruction of infrastructure.

The current situation in Syria is offering a window of opportunity for the political settlement process. The international community should firmly support the role of the United Nations as the main channel of mediation and push the Syrian parties to come to a solution that addresses the concerns of all parties through negotiations, based on the principle that the process should be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and in accordance with Council resolution 2254 (2015). Only by so doing can we truly ease the humanitarian woes facing Syria once and for all, leading to a comprehensive, just and proper settlement of the Syrian issue.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his comprehensive and very informative briefing.

As we know that the ongoing conflict continues to have an impact on the lives of civilians in Syria, we strongly support humanitarian actors, including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, operating across the country in saving lives. We voted for resolution 2449 (2018) today, as we did for every resolution during our two-year term in the Security Council in which the issue of humanitarian aid

and access was discussed. In so doing, Kazakhstan stresses the importance of abiding by the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality, with assistance provided to all, whether in Government-controlled or non-Government-controlled areas, thus leading to an even distribution of humanitarian aid.

We commend UNICEF and the World Health Organization for their work in Syria, especially the 18-month-long intensive vaccination campaign, which has been impressive and ended polio and virus outbreaks in and around Deir ez-Zor. Global experts in public health, urology and epidemiology confirm this conclusion.

With respect to the talks in Astana, we welcome the participation of the representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the recent round of the Astana process on 28 and 29 November, for that led to ways of mitigating the humanitarian situation during discussions with the delegations of Iran, Russia and Turkey. At the same time, in the disaster zones, we see the lack of control over the fair and efficient distribution of food, fuel, drinking water and medicines, especially when the resources flow into the hands of the armed groups and not the civilian population.

Humanitarian aid must not be politicized. It is therefore necessary to implement a mechanism for coordinating the activities of the ICRC, the Syrian Red Crescent Society, United Nations agencies, the Government of Syria and the guarantor countries. We see the great value of the United Nations initiative on demining and restoring the infrastructure of territories liberated from terrorists so as to enable humanitarian operations to begin. This will also assist refugees, including those in the Rukban refugee camp, in returning home.

Kazakhstan considers the initiatives and programmes of the Food and Agriculture Organization most relevant, and appeals to other countries to support and promote the organization's programmes, including providing Syrian farmers with free or subsidized seeds and fertilizers, in order to improve the food situation in the country.

Finally, we acknowledge with deep appreciation the contribution of all participants in the Astana process and in particular the guarantor States. The Astana negotiations on Syria will focus on consolidating peaceful efforts in Syria and ending the human suffering. This is possible, it is evident, through an inclusive Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. It is only when the political tensions ease that the humanitarian crisis will be relieved over time.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and for Mr. Mark Lowcock's important briefing.

Peru follows with deep concern the continuing conflict and the serious humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. It is clear that in recent months there have been developments on the ground and that levels of violence have been reduced. It is also true that millions of people are living in conditions of extreme vulnerability.

We must deplore the persistence of violence in the north-west of the country and its impact on the civilian population, with new fatalities and injuries. We consider it essential to avoid another humanitarian tragedy by preserving the demilitarized zone established in Idlib, thanks to the agreement reached by Turkey and the Russian Federation last September. We also consider it necessary to address the precarious conditions in which the civilian population trapped in Deir ez-Zor is living, and to protect them from attacks directed against Da'esh militants.

In reiterating our strong condemnation of all terrorist activity, we emphasize the need to observe the humanitarian principles of proportionality, legality and precaution. In welcoming the recent United Nations humanitarian deployment in Rukban, we underscore the obligation to allow sustained access to assistance for as long as necessary.

On the other hand, we would like to welcome the first advances made by the Astana group in the identification of missing persons, the return of mortal remains, and the release of detainees and missing persons. We hope that new and further developments in these important humanitarian issues will contribute in the coming weeks and months to promoting the relief from tensions required to end the conflict and achieve Syrian reconciliation.

I conclude by stressing the need for the Security Council to remain united in the exercise of its responsibilities under international humanitarian law,

as reflected in the adoption of resolution 2449 (2018), which, inter alia, has extended access to cross-border assistance. In this regard, we acknowledge the efforts of the delegations of Sweden and Kuwait to move the draft resolution forward with a view to alleviating the suffering of the Syrian population.

However, we must bear in mind that only the achievement of a political solution that lays the foundations for sustainable peace in Syria will make it possible to overcome the humanitarian disaster that continues to affect its population. In this vein, we wish, finally, to stress the importance of convening the constitutional committee before the end of this year, with a view to making progress in the construction of a political solution to the Syrian conflict, guided by resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

My delegation would like to congratulate Mr. Mark Lowcock on his excellent briefing on the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Côte d'Ivoire remains particularly concerned about the precarious humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has recently been aggravated by the military escalation in the north-west of the country, including in the demilitarized zone in the Idlib governorate, which was established in accordance with the agreement signed by the Russian Federation and Turkey on 17 September. This new military escalation, following allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Aleppo by armed groups, is an impediment to the ongoing peace process and threatens the lives and well-being of millions of civilians living in the region. My delegation would like to remind all stakeholders of their responsibilities to ensure safe, prompt, unimpeded and sustainable access for humanitarian assistance to persons in distress throughout the Syrian territory. In that regard, we welcome the arrival of a United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent humanitarian convoy at the Rukban displaced persons camp on 3 November after a 10-month interruption. That delivery provided relief for the people seriously affected by weather, the sanitary conditions and the lack of basic goods.

My delegation voted in favour of renewing for one year the mechanism for the delivery of cross-border humanitarian aid, which expires on 10 January 2019. For the fourth consecutive year, that allows the United Nations and its partners to continue their humanitarian assistance work despite the many challenges. We thank Kuwait and Sweden for their work in that regard. Côte d'Ivoire emphasizes the fact that all parties to the conflict have the obligation to respect international humanitarian law and human rights, including the responsibility to protect civilians.

In conclusion, my country remains convinced that only a lasting political solution will put an end to the Syrian crisis. The intra-Syrian negotiations conducted under the auspices of the United Nations and the Astana and Sochi processes constitute the legitimate frameworks to achieve that. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire urges the warring parties to agree on the formation of the constitutional committee, which is meant to draft a new constitution. That will be a decisive step towards organizing transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections with a view to restoring lasting peace and stability in Syria.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The paradox that attracted my attention during this meeting on the humanitarian situation in my country, Syria — throughout Syria, not only in part of it — is that some colleagues who spoke, in particular the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, Kuwait, the United States of America, Britain and France, had an extraordinarily narrow-minded view of resolution 2449 (2018) on renewing the so-called mechanism for the delivery of cross-border aid. It was repeated at the beginning of all their statements. They wanted the extension of the mechanism only to transcend Syrian sovereignty by continuing the cross-border aid. That is the crux of the issue. They disregarded the fact that such operations — the so-called cross-border humanitarian aid — covers only 5 per cent of the assistance delivered to Syrians. Ninety-five per cent of humanitarian assistance is therefore delivered within the Syrian territory, not across the borders.

That is of course apart from the fact that the border crossings with Turkey are used to smuggle weapons and terrorists, not to provide humanitarian aid. It is a long story that we have repeatedly mentioned. There are dozens of Turkish officers and judges in Turkish prisons because they revealed that the cross-border convoys

were delivering weapons, not humanitarian assistance. Despite that fact, some are still doubtful after eight years of the terrorist war being waged against my country by a devilish global coalition, some members of which are present in the Council's Chamber.

Today, we are considering the fifty-eighth report of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in my country, Syria (S/2018/1104). As representatives know, the Security Council has adopted many resolutions and held hundreds of formal and informal meetings in that regard. I believe that, after all those resolutions and meetings, it is high time for the Council to ask the following question: is the purpose of those reports, meetings and resolutions really to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria or for some to put political pressure on the Syrian Government and to use the suffering and pain of Syrians for cheap political purposes? I would say that if the objective, as some allege, is to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria, what we need today is not to adopt new resolutions or to hold spectacular meetings, but to do the following.

First, it is necessary to help the Syrian Government to combat the remnants of the armed terrorist groups, which were the main cause of the humanitarian crisis and its escalation, including the displaced persons and refugee crises. Anyone following the crisis and truly wanting the well-being of Syrians would see that the humanitarian crisis is only in areas infiltrated by those armed terrorist groups, which harbour illegal foreign troops.

Damascus has 8 million inhabitants. We do not face any humanitarian problems there. There is no humanitarian crisis in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs or Hamah. They are all under the control of the State. The humanitarian crisis is prevalent only in areas under the control of armed terrorist groups and foreign occupation. Members have talked about Al-Tanf and Rukban. Who protects the terrorists from Da'esh in those areas? Is it not the United States forces?

Secondly, the Security Council must shoulder its responsibility by taking serious and immediate steps to stop the aggression, massacres and systematic destruction of infrastructure in Syria carried out by the illegal coalition led by the United States of America. The Council must compel the countries of that illegal coalition to abide by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the Council resolutions, which all underline the condemnation of such crimes of aggression and interference in the internal affairs of States, while undermining the territorial integrity of Member States. It is as if all that was not set out in the Council's resolutions but was written by Shakespeare 400 years ago.

Thirdly, there must be an immediate lifting of the unilateral coercive measures imposed against the Syrian people by certain States, some of which are members of the Council and present in the Chamber. Those measures have greatly harmed the livelihood of Syrians. My colleagues the Ambassador of the Russian Federation and the Ambassador of Bolivia have thankfully mentioned that. Those ongoing measures, which are described by some as sanctions, are not sanctions because they were not imposed by the Security Council. They are unilateral coercive measures that are condemned by the so-called international community. We have adopted many resolutions in the General Assembly in that regard. The continuation of those measures is the main obstacle to ensuring a response to the basic needs of Syrians, supporting their livelihood and providing the basic requirements for the return of displaced Syrians and refugees to their homes and normal lives.

Fourthly, international humanitarian assistance must be stepped up to respond to the needs of the Syrians, especially given the current status of financing humanitarian assistance, which has yet to meet expectations, as Mr. Lowcock stated earlier. Donors continue to hold their theatrical conferences and link their financing to political conditions that run counter to the principles of humanitarian work. They have refused to support the reconstruction of Syrian facilities that provide basic services in order to strengthen the steadfastness of the Syrians and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes in dignity and safety. We listened today to our colleagues' statements on behalf of the United States, Britain and France in which they clearly spoke about their political preconditions for reconstruction, the return of refugees and ending their support for terrorism.

Fifthly, the politicization of the humanitarian aspect in Syria must be brought to an end, including by stopping the spread of falsified information and statistics and ceasing to ignore facts, changes and developments on the ground. Of course, when we discuss that issue, we have facts, statistics and evidence at our disposal to substantiate what we say. Others make false statements by saying that only four or five humanitarian convoys

have reached their destination during a particular month. That is untrue. I was in Damascus a few days ago, and I visited the President of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. I asked him how many convoys had been sent since the beginning of this year to date. I point this out for Mr. Lowcock's benefit. He provided me with the table I have before me, showing a total of 182 convoys, all solely carried out exclusively by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Some brief the Council with falsified information to say that only four or 12 convoys were sent. When they send a convoy to Rukban or Al-Tanf with our consent, they deliver it to the terrorists. It is not delivered to the 50,000 civilians who are in dire need of assistance. For Mr. Lowcock's information, the convoy that went to Al-Tanf ended up in the hands of the terrorists, as he is well aware.

Extending the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014) does not correspond to the recent developments on the ground since its adoption on 14 July 2014. There is no longer any need for cross-border humanitarian assistance as we have regained control of all areas that were categorized as besieged or hard-to-reach. In that regard, I would like to stress once again that the Government of Syria is the most eager of all to provide every form of humanitarian assistance to its people wherever they are throughout Syria. That is our duty and we are duly discharging it in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The Government of Syria will remain committed to fulfilling that obligation. I also emphasize that my country stands ready to cooperate and coordinate with the United Nations and its humanitarian partners under the guidelines governing the coordination and enhancement of humanitarian work, which stress the need to respect the sovereignty and independence of host countries and the role of the countries concerned in overseeing the distribution of humanitarian assistance within their territories, as well as respect for the principles of impartiality, integrity and non-politicization.

There is a State in Syria. It is a State that deserves the respect of all and the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the provisions of the Charter and international law. That is the main issue. However, when certain representatives refer in their statements to a "regime" or use other, similar terms indiscriminately, such speech is not fitting of the Council or those addressing it.

Some Council members insist on extending the provisions of resolution 2165 (2014), while deliberately turning a blind eye to my country's objective criticism of the resolution and its extension. That in no way negates its defects or implementation since the very first day of its adoption. I would like to briefly cite those defects in the hope that they will not be committed later.

First, the hub for humanitarian assistance for the Syrian crisis is in Damascus — the capital of Syria — and not, as the resolution attempts to convey, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Gaziantep, Turkey, or any other place.

Secondly, receiving the consent of the Government of Syria before humanitarian assistance crosses its country's borders is a guiding principle in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182. We should not simply be informed, as stated in the Security Council resolution, because such a move is similar to the consultation process conducted by the co-sponsors of resolution 2449 (2018), adopted today. They said that they had consulted us, which is correct. They did not, however, consider any of our observations. Is that what consultations mean?

Thirdly, the United Nations monitoring mechanism remains incapable to this very day of verifying the delivery of cross-border assistance and whether it reaches those for whom it is intended. The majority of those operations take place across the Turkish-Syrian border and are directed towards areas under the control of the armed terrorist groups that confiscate such aid and distribute it to their own members and families, as happened in Al-Tanf. The mechanism has stood idly by over the past four years rather than prevent the misuse of those borders by neighbouring countries that have taken advantage of the situation, provided support to armed terrorist groups and smuggled whatever those groups looted from factories, as well as antiquities and petroleum products, back into their own territories.

Fourthly, the effectiveness of cross-border assistance was and remains limited when compared to the assistance distributed from within the Syrian Arab Republic, as I previously mentioned.

Fifthly, senior OCHA staff members have not upheld the principles of transparency or provided the necessary guarantees to convince the international community that the cross-border assistance would reach those for whom it is intended and not the armed groups. To this very day, those senior OCHA staff members have not been able to provide an adequate explanation regarding the so-called partners or independent

companies — third parties — that were contracted to verify the delivery of assistance to warehouses and beneficiaries despite our repeated requests.

Sixthly, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which has been listed as a terrorist group by the Security Council, levies taxes on assistance delivered from across the borders, especially the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing between Turkey and Syria. That is considered to be direct financing of terrorism, in violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 2178 (2014), 2253 (2015) and 2396 (2017). That is exactly what Qatar did when it disbursed millions of dollars to Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front in the occupied Golan Heights under the pretext of paying ransom to free the hostages taken by those terrorist groups, which is once again a clear violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2368 (2017).

In conclusion, the Government, the people and the army of my country know very well who is our enemy and who is our friend. We know very well that our fight against terrorism is a war imposed on us by the sponsors of terrorism to drain our energies in order to advance their unjust plans in the region, foremost among which is eliminating the Palestinian question and drowning the people of the region in bloody obscurantism, fuelled by extremist Wahhabi ideology, ignorance and agendas of destruction.

My Government is more determined today than ever to fight the remaining armed terrorist groups in Idlib and elsewhere. We are firm in exercising our legal right for self-defence and expelling all foreign occupying forces that have entered our territories illegally. My colleague the representative of the United States of America brazenly stated today that his country has spent $8 billion towards financing terrorism in Syria, which he labelled as humanitarian assistance. Those $8 billion were in fact for financing terrorism.

We will continue to reconstruct the areas destroyed by terrorists in order to restore normality to everyday life and allow our people to enjoy the lives that they had built before the war was imposed on them by the terrorists. That will enable Syrian citizens to return to their homeland after they left it because of terrorism and the unilateral coercive economic measures that targeted their livelihoods.

The success of the sponsors of terrorism, destruction and the assassins of international law in certain places does not in any way mean that their plan will succeed in our country. We vow to foil their schemes and conspiracies.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.